**[Lessons from Libya](https://www.dawn.com/news/1783034/lessons-from-libya)**

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ONE of the most catastrophic floods in Libya not just killed thousands and left behind tossed-up cars and heaps of rubble but also bequeathed lessons for the world. Climate change, protracted violence, lack of governance, ramshackle infrastructure and corruption coalesced to unleash a nightmare.

Libya, the resource-rich North African country flanked by the Mediterranean Sea, sits in a sprawling desert that constitutes 90 per cent of its land mass. The country has been reeling politically ever since Nato backed an anti-Qadhafi rebellion during the Arab Spring of 2011. Since then, Libya has been in a state of chaos. Admini­stered by two embattled warlords and ene­r­­vated by unfathomable corruption, it found itself ill-prepared to manage natural cataclysms.

Storm Daniel that hit Libya last month brought with it torrential rains and whirling wind currents. Before making landfall, the storm had already struck Greece with record-breaking rainfall. The Greek village of Zagora reported 750 millimetres of rain in 24 hours, which according to the World Meteorological Organisation was equal to about 18 months of rainfall.

The storm then barrelled in a southwest direction over the Mediterranean Sea, which witnessed the highest temperatures this year. The warmer waters further fuelled the storm, creating a ‘medicane’ (Mediterranean hurricane). After making landfall on Libya’s northeast coastline, the storm delivered 414mm of rain dwarfing the monthly average of less than 2mm. Thus climate change manifested its fury with unprecedented might. The National Meteorological Centre in Tripoli had issued an early warning of the severe storm 72 hours in advance and a state of emergency was declared in eastern Libya. However, there was no governance structure in place to take emergency measures to mitigate the intensity of the disaster.

Poor governance worsens the impact of natural calamities.

Water descended from the highland near Derna, a city of 90,000 on the banks of Wadi Derna, a non-perennial river. Two Wadi Derna dams constructed in the 1960s to control the floods couldn’t withstand the pressure of the torrential flows and collapsed. The ensuing apocalyptic flood unleashed havoc and destroyed 900 buildings in Derna. The rain and flood also affected Benghazi, Tobruk, Almari and Sousa. The Libyan Red Crescent confirmed more than 11,000 deaths, while countless people were injured. In the city of Derna alone, over 5,000 people died. Footage of the death and destruction are harrowing.

Whereas hurricane and rain were climate-induced, the bursting of dams was the outcome of decades-long neglect, corruption and pervasive lawlessness; all were intensified by the bloody conflict in the country. During Qadhafi’s era, the dam had been repaired twice in 1977 and 1986. These dams successfully contained floods in 1968, 1969 and 2011 and protected the city. However, after the regime was toppled in Tripoli, everything sunk into chaos. Bloodshed by rival militias ushered in an era of non-governance. Fragmented authorities preoccupied with war, completely abandoned development in their territories.

As Claudia Gazzini, a senior Libya analyst for the International Crisis Group said “for the past 10 years, there hasn’t really been much investment in the country’s infrastructure. For the past three years there has been no development budget, which is where funds for infrastructure should fall, and no allocation for long-term projects”.

Menacing alerts were already being echoed by experts about the crumbling dams. A report by civil en­­gineering expert Abdel­wanees Asho­­or from Libya’s University of Omar Al-Mukhtar, said that “the current situation in the Derna valley basin requires regular maintenance of the dams, because in the event of a huge flood, the result will be disastrous for the residents of the valley and the city”. Libya’s audit bureau reported in 2021 that 2.3 million euros (670m in Pakistani rupees) were allocated by the water resources ministry to maintain the dam. A company had been contracted for the project, but it was never executed.

In the wake of the unimaginable amount of rain, the water level swelled behind the dam. Shrugging off an impending calamity, the Haftar-controlled water ministry asserted that the dam was fine and that fears were unfounded. By the time they called for evacuation, disaster was already at their door — 115m cubic meters of water producing over 100 terajoules of energy, whipped the city with a force greater than the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki.

The tragedy of Libya is a grim reminder for Pakistan and other countries that the consequences of climate change are exacerbated by conflicts, bad governance, corruption and neglected infrastructure. Politi­cally unstable regions are prone to greater risk of climatic wrath as human actions augment the impact of climate change.

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